



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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NEW YORK, NY 10021

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

November 7, 1983

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Academician A.D. Aleksandrov
Soviet Academy of Sciences
Moscow, USSR.

Dear Academician Aleksandrov:

pp 42-47.
Just now I have received notice and a translation of your address to the Soviet Academy of Sciences published in the VESTNIK, #6, 1981.

In this article, it appears that my name is coupled with race-prejudiced views on human genetics and with suggestions to punish the poor! These are views which I wholly repudiate, and which are as repugnant to me as they are to you and to your colleagues in the Academy. I have denounced misconceptions of genetic fatalism on many occasions, and for that reason it is particularly misleading that my name should be enlisted as condemning people for their genes. Furthermore, I have expressed the greatest skepticism about the importance of genetic factors playing any important role in economic accomplishment by race, religion, class, or any other major cultural grouping. The pathologies of intellectual development are individual tragedies that deserve earnest scientific study, but there is no evidence whatever that they have any bearing on group differences.

In fact, if you will study the leading writers on human genetics in my country, and elsewhere in the west, you will find they hold views that give the greatest weight to the environmental sources of economic deprivation: not markedly different from your own statement. You may wish to refer to the leading textbooks and monographs, like those by Cavalli-Sforza & Bodmer; Stern; Vogel & Motulsky.

Perhaps there is some controversy about policies of family planning that are concerned with the further burden of large families on economic development. I believe the scientifically correct perspective about the role of genetic factors here is to be agnostic; and I would condemn social policies that have no affirmed scientific foundation.

It is not unusual to see misattributions in the polemical press, and I would ordinarily ignore those. An address, to your distinguished colleagues in the Academy, I would take to invite serious consideration in accordance with customary canons of

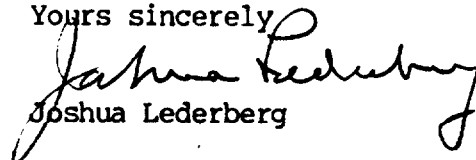
scientific precision. In that spirit I ask that you consider a correction even at this late date.

I take the liberty of enclosing the texts of my most relevant writings on the subject of your address. Evidently, your attribution was taken from an article I wrote in 1969, which I learned only now had been translated in the Lit. Gaz. It is possible that some of the nuances (in the tradition of Jonathan Swift, and his 'modest proposal') were misappreciated in translation, and that this is the source of the mistaken association of my name with the very views I was attacking!

It is also sadly true that a few dangerously misguided people even now follow doctrines of racial inferiority, in many parts of the world. Scarcely any of them are professional geneticists, and I follow the consensus of my profession in denouncing these slanders that have no scientific basis.

Your courtesy in including a correction — if you wish, this very letter — in the Vestnik, would I believe be in the best traditions of scientific scholarship, and on my part would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely


Joshua Lederberg

CC: N.P. Dubinin